Ethan Guthrie Herrell  
  
 I guess that unlike most white Americans, who acknowledge certain ethnic ancestors but don’t really identify with them (“I’m Scots-Irish” is common, but most don’t really walk around in kilts), I have a strong sense of my ethnic identity. I am a Yankee, an English-American, a descendent of those brave (but very cruel) people on the Mayflower who came and began the British invasion of North America. My ancestor Ezekial Chase (which was my grandmother’s maiden name), was the first white settler in Piscatiquis country, where I grew up. The graves of his great-great grandchildren were a ten minute drive from my house. This is mostly due to my family’s particular culture: a blend of traditional Yankee values of frugality, bland mainline Protestantism, the Protestant work ethic, small-town childhoods and a tendency to wander. Because of this, my family has a rich oral history tradition. I was raised in history, and reminders of the past were everywhere. I know stories from my grandparents and aunts and uncles childhoods. Here are some of my favorites:  
  
I asked my grandpa where he was born. He said, “Well it was the summer, so I think in the Winterport hospital.”  
“What do you mean?”  
“Well, it was summer… so it was open.”  
“What?”

“In the winter, they closed. Only the summer people could afford it. So in the winter, you had the baby in ya house.”  
My grandfather was born in 1925, in the United States of America, and his mother might not even have had a hospital to go to.   
When he was born, he was the last of 11 children. His mother pointed at him when he came out and said, “THIS IS IT!”  
My great-grandfather held him in a blanket and said, “But this is the one we’ve been waiting for.”  
And as chance would have it, my grandfather is the last alive out all his siblings and his first cousins.   
  
Another favorite:  
My 4 uncles and two brothers were all black sheep in one way or another. They lived and traveled all over the country: Boston, New Orleans, San Francisco, Lafayette, and back to Maine. They drank heavy and partied and did all sorts of crazy stuff. It was 60s and 70s. My brother Steven went on a road trip across Louisiana with our uncle Tom once. Tom pulled over for beer, and he chose the worst gas station in the state to do it in. Immediately my brother sees that this is clearly “the black people’s gas station”, who are all giving the stink eye to these “honkies.” The guys at that gas station were old enough to remember Jim Crow. Steven, in a panic, says that all he wants is a six-pack of PBR. Tom walks right in, no fear. When he comes out, he’s got a 24 rack of Heineken.   
“Tommy, I wanted a six pack, what the hell is this?”  
Tom, in his raspy voice, “It’s what the brothers drink, I didn’t wanna stick out.”

I remember those stories by heart, the exact words used to translate them to me. And there are some two dozen others just like it.   
 Looking back at that oral tradition, it only makes then that history would be my favorite subject in school. I became absorbed in its narrative sweep and general themes. The repetition of events had one or two teachers that wouldn’t be up to UMF standards, but there was at least who, while not being perfect, was still the most progressive teacher in the school, easily. He’s the reason that I read “Lies My Teacher Told Me” and think, “Well, duh!” I thought he was just an outright awesome human being: built like a gorilla, rode his bike across the whole continental United States twice, had read hundreds of books, accepted no shenanigans. His charisma was for the longest time my model of teaching, but now I see differently. I’m not that tough guy. I’m a hippie. When I talked with him years later, I discovered the extent of his weariness from the state of the profession, and I was both disillusionment by it but also understanding. I’d had had basically no field experience. I wasn’t in a place to judge.

But the most important moment in my development as a teacher was when I became bored of history. I came to see how mostly irrelevant most of what I liked and planned to teach was. I didn’t want to teach Roman history. Maybe democratic institutions around the world. The Civil War? Definitely not. There was a whole other world of possibilities: What about refugee crisis around the world and throughout history? A history of slavery, from the quilombolas of Brazil to ancient Greece? Anything but the straight chronology of a nation (or empire) narrative I had been through so many times before. As much as I love the chronological ordered story of countries and empires as a student, I hate it as a teacher. In practicum, when I had to teach about the War of 1812, I realized how uncomfortable it made me to convey things that way, and how the students clearly felt the same.  
 Hand-in-hand with my boredom of history was my transformation into a hippie. I’ve now come to believe that most of schools are trying to do is archaic and irrelevant. We’re training kids to participate in an industrial and consumerist economy whose fossil fuels will be exhausted in the next several decades. We need a new society organized around local food production and governance, but many of our answers to our problems are still national in focus: nationally shared standards, curriculum and tests. We will desperately need manual labor, but schools do little to teach about gardening, crafts and forestry. I question the validity of even having an “America” at all, given just how much damage the national government has done. I don’t believe in the laptops and other devices that are proliferating either: The west African mining operations that produce the metals for the devices involve massive human rights violations, and that’s the only reason we can afford them. I definitely love the act of teaching. My greatest frustration right now is that I have all these ideas, and I want to try them. I have ideas about teaching about the War on Drugs, about democratic governments, about how teach kids what their civil rights are. But I would be lying if I said that I know exactly where I’m going to go from here.